

Testimony of Sandra S. Landis, Leader
Montgomery County Chapter of Start School Later

FY22 Operating Budget and additional Amendments to the FY21-26 Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

April 8, 2021, 7:00 pm

Good Evening Members of the Council and Public here today.

My name is Sandra Landis, and I have been a resident of Montgomery County for nearly 35 years. I'm here before you representing Start School Later, a national organization that began as a grass roots movement right here in Montgomery County.

I'm here tonight to encourage you to enact a FY 2022 budget that will finally eliminate structural bias in the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) high school start times by funding sufficient bus transportation such that all MCPS schools begin no earlier than the 8:30 a.m recommended by nearly every medical organization and the National PTA. Under normal times, we achieve that in our elementary and middle schools, but our teens have been left behind, which is quite unfortunate.

There are decades of research into the importance of healthy sleep times for teens and adolescents. They not only need enough sleep, but their onset of sleep is metabolically delayed. As such, early morning school start times are particularly detrimental to their development of higher level brain functions including reasoning, problem solving, and good judgement that occur during these years. Unfortunately, it

appears that MCPS did not request funds to support this initiative, which is why I am here tonight to encourage you to look into funding this.

Good public policy, matched with our unprecedented levels of budgetary resources not only from within our own county, but due to the influx of State as well as Federal CARES and American Recovery Act funds, can allow us to achieve outcomes will benefit everyone.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, later start times are the single most cost -effective public health intervention with potential to help the largest number of children combat adolescent sleep loss.

The COVID recovery has demonstrated that the only barrier in MCPS to achieving acceptable high school start times is the availability of bus transportation, since in-person high school is now beginning at 9 a.m. Unfortunately, those who rely on school buses in the recovery period are confronted with the choice of either arriving to High School more than an hour before classes begin, or continuing the learning loss experienced with distance learning. The option to attend in person school not only deprives them of much needed sleep, but places them at risk of potential exposure to COVID during this extra hour of non-instructional indoor time, caused by the buses needing to be reused. This inequality is all the more jarring because students who can provide their own transportation are not subject to this risk. We have all the

learned the importance of school to our students' and staff's social, emotional, psychological, and physical well-being.

In fact, every problem facing public schools has been demonstrated to improve with later bell times – from increasing graduation rates, decreasing student depression and suicide, reducing early morning auto accidents, and decreasing behavioral problems and violence, just to name a few. School systems around the country that implemented later bell times have been able to continue to support clubs and athletics. We can, too.

Planning now for the Fall return to school to provide sufficient transportation to accommodate later bell times is critical. I hope you will use your elected position and the vast resources available to Montgomery County to resolve what I hope was merely an inadvertent oversight in this area. Our children deserve appropriate public policy to support their biologically based, developmental needs, and are counting on you to accomplish that.